DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 207 009 CS 006 251

AUTHOR Kreitlow, Burton W.
TITLE Teaching the Adult of the "80"s.
PUB DATE Mar 81
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Michigan Reading Association (25th, Grand Rapids, MI, March 8-10, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Basic Education; Adult Education; *Adult Learning; Adult Literacy; Adult Programs; Adults; Basic Skills; High School Equivalency Programs; *Nontraditional Students; *Reading Instruction; Self Esteem; Student Teacher Relationship; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

Intended for reading specialists and adult education teachers, this paper assesses the current state of adult basic skills, the general education degree, and English as a second language teaching. The first part of the paper consists of a series of tables representing demographics of participants in adult education programs. The second part discusses the problem of low self-esteem found in many adult basic education students and how this affects the qualifications required of adult education teachers. The third part of the paper outlines the responsibilities of an adult education teacher, and discusses the frame of mind necessary to be successful and to make the experience of teaching adults a rewarding one. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED207009

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Michigan Reading Association (25th, Grand Rapids, MI, March 8-10, 1981)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"Teaching the Adult of the '80's"

Burton W. Kreitlow
University of Wisconsin-Madison

I'm going to do three things:

1st - Describe the present situation regarding adult participation in learning with some special data on the low literate population.

2nd - Talk a bit about the ABE/GED/ESL teacher, adults in the program and teaching Reading.

3rd - Identify your three greatest responsibilities as an ABE/GED/ESL teacher.

I. The Situation

A. All Adults

Definition from 1978 U.S. Census Survey:
Courses and other educational activities organized by a teacher or sponsoring agency, and taken by persons beyond compulsory school age. Excludes: Any full-time study, apprenticeship programs, self-directed learning, individual counseling, religious worship activities.

Table 1. Population Structure

	1975	1990
0-24	93,860,000	89,925,000
25-64	97,275,000	123,765,000
65+	22,405,000	29,824,000
TOTAL	213,540,000	243,514,000

The numbers of adults in the U.S. is increasing by over 2 million per year.

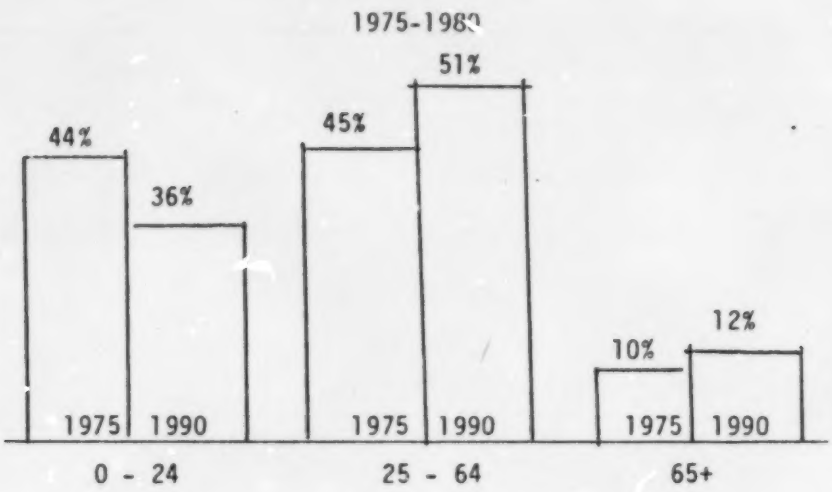
"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Burton W. Kreitlow

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS806257

Table 2. Population Structure



The number of young adults will be decreasing

Table 3. Adult Education Participants

Ed. Level	Total Pop.	Adult Ed. Part.	Participation Percentage
Less than 4 yrs. H.S.	34%	1,513,000	2.9%
4 years high school	37	5,770,000	10.2
1-3 years college	16	3,961,000	16.5
4 years college or +	14	5,599,000	26.0
TOTAL		16,843,000	10.9%

The level of educational participation by adults is lowest for those with the least formal education.

Table 4. Age and Sex of Participants

Age	% Participation	Sex	% Participation
17-34	14.1%	male	9.9%
35-54	12.5	female	11.8
55+	4.4		

The level of participation is highest for young adults.
Female participation is greater than that of males.

Table 5. Annual Family Income of Participants

Annual Family Income	% Participation
Under $ 5,000	4.3%
$5,000- 7,499	5.7
7,500- 9,999	9.1
10,000-14,999	10.6
15,000-24,999	14.1
25,000 & over	17.0

Participation goes up with income

Table 6. Where Adult Education Takes Place

	Percent of Courses Offered
Educational institutions	54.1%
Tutor private instructor	4.6
Business or industry	11.0
Labor & Prof. organizations	3.8
Government agency	8.5
Private comm. organizations	8.3

Over 45% of all institutional adult education takes place outside of public institutions

Table 7. Reasons for Participation

Reasons	Percent
Job related	53%
General education	13
Personal or social (recreation, self-development, etc.	31

Over one-half of all adult participation in education is job related.

B. Low Literates

The following data are from telephone interviews of a random sample of 1680 adults 16 years of age and older, not in school and not high school graduates. Among those 16 years old and over in Wisconsin who are without a high school diploma the following is true:

Table 8. Respondents Who Believe Adult Classes Would be Helpful

	Age				
Sex	16-25	26-45	46-65	66+	TOTAL
Male	78	73	45	29	55
Female	85	84	60	32	60
TOTAL	82	79	54	31	
LEVEL OF EDUCATION					
0-8	88	83	50	28	42
9-11	82	79	61	41	72

Eighty two percent of those age 16-25 believe adult classes would be helpful to them.

Table 9. Education and Interest in ABE/GED by Age

Education	Age				
	16-25	26-45	46-65	66+	TOTAL
	Percent indicating an interest in ABE/GED				
0-8	56	41	15	9	15
9-11	35	24	12	7	24
TOTAL	36	27	14	9	

Over one third of the above group are interested in ABE/GED.

Table 10. Subjects Respondents Would Have Liked to Have Learned in School That They Did Not Learn

Subject	Percent
Math	19
Reading & Grammar	16
Secretarial	7
English language	5
History	4
Science	3
Nursing	3
Foreign language	2
Music	2
Sewing	2
Auto mechanics	1

Nearly one half of those without a high school diploma would have liked to have learned more in the academic subjects when they were in school.

Table 11. Age Distribution, Sample of Respondents, General Population and ABE Participants in Percent of Total

Age	Respondents	General Population	ABE Participants
16-25	19	19	58
26-35	8	14	23
36-45	10	10	11
46-55	11	11	6
56-65	17	9	2
66-75	19	11	1
76 & older	12		

Among all ABE/GED participants in Wisconsin 58% are age 16-25

Table 12. 1979 Income of 1680 Respondents

Income Level	Percent
Less than $6,000	27
6,000 - 11,999	25
12,000 - 17,999	15
18,000 and over	12

Twenty seven percent of those without a high school diploma earned $12,000 or more in 1979.

Table 13. Extent to Which Non-high School Graduates Watch Television

Time in Hours	Percent
None	6
.1 - 1.9	19
2 - 3.9	41
4 or more	34

Over one third of those without a high school diploma watch TV four or more hours a day.

Table 14. Primary Source of Respondent's Support

Source of Support	Percent
Employment	44
Social Security	32
Spouse	10
Welfare	3
Pension	3
Parents	2
Investments	2
Unemployment	1
Other	2

About one third of those without a high school diploma are on social security.

II. The ABE/GED/ESL Teacher

Unless you have worked with low literate, the new immigrant and the disadvantaged outside of the classroom you may not be aware of the nature of the adult whom ABE/GED/ESL teachers are teaching to read. A few years ago I was involved in an evaluation of ABE in Indiana. I arranged for a young woman working in the Vista program to interview a number of disadvantaged rural adults whose school attendance was under Grade 10. The completed interviews when returned were accompanied by a letter. This is what she wrote:

> I have been doing some thinking while doing these interviews. The younger people who have quit school and aren't married with families would like to go back to learn more to get a better job. But they don't, and I think some of the reasons cannot be found by asking them, because some don't actually know why they don't go back if they have the chance.
>
> Let me expand on some of the conclusions I have formed. These apply not only to young people, but also to those who are middle aged.
>
> Basically it has to do with success. People who quit school at 16 quit because they have not found success in school. They have failed in school along with other failures in other phases of their lives. Usually this failure has to do with reading ability--rather the lack of it. In school they pretend to be able to read. (Would you admit you couldn't? Why, everyone knows how to read!) They get bad grades. They get put in the lower classes, even Special Education. They are labeled by teachers as non-readers, so the teacher doesn't bother--so school is not a place where the person goes to feel good about himself.

OK, so the dropout has failed in school. He hates it. He feels he can never learn to read. He honestly believes that he can't. Why in all human nature should a person voluntarily return to a situation which he only feels can bring back the feelings of inadequacy. He is positive he can't do the work. The unfortunate truth is--he probably cannot without help, help in his reading skills, help in the attitude he has toward himself and attitude toward his ability to learn.

What's the answer? I don't know, but it's got to be a method of teaching in which a non-reader (not a mentally deficient person or an idiot, just a person who got behind) experiences success; where he can see he's making progress. It's got to be a different atmosphere than the school he remembers he failed in.

This involved, young and deeply caring young woman painted this composite picture of what she saw in dealing directly with undereducated low income adults. When they get into an ABE program they become the responsibility of the ABE teacher. She is to teach them to read or to improve their reading, their coping and vocational skills. That's what ABE is all about.

Most ABE teachers begin their teaching as a "moonlighter" from a full time day school teaching assignment or as former teachers looking for part time work. They need help in the teaching of reading right from the start. They need to know about teaching adults right from the start. They need to know something about the boat people right from the start. Their search for help is not often focussed on credit classes nor on long range in-service programs. They want 'how to do it' tips and they want them now.

Capabilities Needed by ABE Teachers

I'm not a reading specialist but if I were I don't know which reading method I would propose. When forced to, as in the Steck Vaughn Series, I choose instructors with a tight adult content. I do know some of the capabilities the ABE teachers need in their teaching of reading to ABE students and will list them.

1) Like the remedial reading teachers in elementary and high schools they need to learn how to assess student's present level of reading. They need to be able to identify the barriers that keep him from reading effectively. Is it the lack of phonics skills? Is it a problem of laterality? Is it vision or hearing? The ABE teacher needs the skills to analyze informally and try to establish why this person didn't learn to read in school. The ABE teacher needs to know how to help the student now, not next week. This will include the initial assessment through informal means and later the use of formal means. But the emphasis in both needs to be through a personal, relaxed, friendly and helping atmosphere rather than in a teacher-child relationship or by means of a "go see the counselor" routine.

2) ABE teachers must be prepared to deal directly with skill development in the learning to read process. The skill of decoding symbols into meaningful words is essential to the low-literate adult. The teacher must know how to develop this skill so that early successis assured. (Success today). Along with word attack skills the adult learner must be aided in learning study skills and the processes of thinking that go into comprehending what is read. Skill development may come without help for a few adults but the teacher in ABE classes should be prepared to deal with it.

3) ABE teachers need an easy familiarity with materials that can be used to teach adults to read. Materials that can be used in ABE learning laboratories

are of particular value because of the opportunities adults need to learn at their own pace.

4) ABE teachers must be capable of using students expressed and sometimes suppressed needs and meld them into the teaching of reading. This takes unusual skill in teaching and unusual empathy with the student.

The ABE students' problems are real. Five kids to feed on an AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) allotment, housing that lacks sanitary and safety factors to support a normal life style, children who need help so they too do not fail; these are the ingredients that are the base of those who come to a learning to read program. The ABE teacher needs to know how to use that base.

5) The ABE teacher needs to be able to organize a learning to read curriculum from the knowledge and talents she has. It includes assessment, skill development materials, awareness of student needs and more. Teacher's desire the security of a curriculum that can be used, adjusted and which leads to samples of student success along the way. Student recognized bits of success along the way are essential as they move through the daily hazards of sick kids, late welfare checks, poor transportation, personal fatigue and the myriad of other maladies that press on them.

I'm not sure that reading specialists, themselves, do at present have the capabilities to tackle the job I expect of teachers. If they don't, it's because they have not really been concerned about the 31 million adults who are unable to read well enough to carry out the basic functions of life in the 1980's. They have not engaged in the research needed in the field of adult reading. As a result, most reading specialists have only pedestrian knowledge of methods of teaching low literate adults.

There are questions that puzzle me about the task of the ABE/ESL teachers. Let me shre them with you.

In what ways is vocabulary at beginning reading similar and different for the new adult reader; for the Cuban and Hmong refugee? Even the reading formula lists haven't been validated for the low literacy adult. How often do you find "cock-a-doodle-do" that comes from the Dale list of 769 easy words in adult reading materials?

Is the low literate adult's response in a criterion referenced skill development program similar to that of a child learning to read?

What are the most effective ways of tapping the experiential background of the new adult reader in teaching him to read? How effective is using motivators like the following in teaching reading: a) passing a driving test, b) writing to a son in service, c) filling out a job application form, d) feeding a family of five on surplus commodities? We think it's important but do we know? It may be for the three percent of the eligible population who now participate in ABE programs, but is it for more than the three percent?

How valid and useful for low literate adults are the achievement tests and reading tests that have been validated on school age children?

From much the same stance we should ask whether or not the whole base of reading research has any transferability to the teaching of reading to low literate adults. Does it? Which research does apply? Which leads us astray?

I'm not suggesting that there are not viable principles and generalizations that cut across all levels of reading and all ages of learners. I'm suggesting only that we haven't focussed sufficiently on this problem to know which ones are viable and which are not.

Most Reading Specialists Have Little Concern for ABE

There are a very few reading specialists who have had a long time concern with the above questions. There are a few others who will help if called on, but teaching reading to the low literate adult is but a periphery concern

for most, and the others barely recognize that ABE exists. They have more than they can now handle in a K-12 program. So what happens? The adult educator who works with teachers of low literate adults is called on again and again to give help in teaching of reading. He does give help in any way he can and soon may so convince the ABE teachers, himself, and reading specialists of his reading competency that they call on him for a conference such as this.

Many ABE teachers teach elementary or secondary classes during the day. The pleasure of working with adults at night makes up for the inadequacies in their knowledge of teaching adults that they know exists. These adults want to learn. The opportunities provided in ABE in-service have been long on exchanging information among teachers with common problems and short on methods for teaching low literacy adults to read. With the almost non-existent research on reading methods for ABE, I can sympathize with the reluctance of the reading specialist to get involved. Indeed, in this field he is not a specialist. He'd rather see me make the mistake than make the mistake himself.

Evidence of this lack of knowledge is also apparent when ABE teachers register for regular campus classes on the teaching of reading. In instances related to me by ABE teachers they reported no real recognition by professors of Reading of the differences between adults and youth in the knowledge base brought into a reading program. The difference between the adult reading at Level II and the 4th grade child is so vast in experience background and in oral vocabulary that principles and generalizations coming from research on reading in the elementary schools do not bridge the gap. The voluntary nature of participation in ABE programs and the usual fifty percent dropout rate is far removed from the thinking of those focussing on reading in the elementary schools.

I think it's easier to teach an adult educator about reading than it is to teach a reading specialist about teaching adults.

III. Your responsibilities as an ABE/GED/ESL teacher

1. To your students - Whatever their goals
   - You should attract learners like a vacuum
   - Learners should attract you like a magnet

2. To your school - Build an atmosphere of learning
   - In the building (only a few adults will enter into the child centered classroom atmosphere.)
   - In the classroom
   - In yourself
   - Build on the principle that you meet learners on their own turf and that turf is the home as well as the school; the community center as well as the school; the church as well as the school.
   - Build the knowledge that your school is really for everyone

3. Your third responsibility it to yourself as a teacher

If you're teaching you're a teacher.

Being certified or a college graduate isn't the key - teaching is.

In our fast paced society you can't fool many students long and you can fool low literates less than college graduates.

To be a teacher of adults you must know what you are and what you are doing - know that you are a teacher, know your subject matter, know how to teach, know that you are a learner first and a teacher second, know how to learn - and your students will learn with you. Learn your subject matter along with your students. (Some subjects do change that fast.) ABE students know more about many things than do you. Could you cope with 5 kids and $10,000 a year? Get students to help you learn to teach (feedback). In addition to being a better practitioner and teacher

in your own specialty, you'll need to keep up with other things going on around you. Continue your own learning so you don't atrophy. Continue to become a more complete person.

A good teacher never really reaches his goal, instead he creates new goals always one step beyond his reach. To become satisfied with your teaching is a move toward becoming an unteacher.

Am I expecting too much of ABE/GED/ESL teachers? I think not. You must and you can do those things that I suggest you can do. Let me review them:

1. Know the situation you're in - the adults in need.
2. Know yourself, your limitations and your strengths.
3. Be a responsible partner and leader to those in your own district. Help others less informed about ABE/GED/ESL partake of your knowledge, your skills and your wisdom.
4. Hold your head high. You have one of the toughest and most rewarding jobs in all of education -- taking the failures of our educational programs and raising their sights and their lives.